



# DECENT WORK & DIGINITY... "PUTTING THE MINISTRY IN THE PALM OF THE CITIZENS' HANDS"

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## SECTORAL DEBATE

JULY 9, 2019 | GORDON HOUSE

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HON. SHAHINE ROBINSON, MP  
Minister of Labour and Social Security

# INTRODUCTION

**Mr. Speaker,** I am humbled to have been granted the privilege of serving the citizens of our beloved country for another year. I am heartened by the positive outpouring of support from members on both sides of this Honourable House as together we work to move our people from poverty to prosperity.



I salute the citizens of North East St. Ann, whose vote of confidence propelled me to this level of national service and by their continued support have allowed me to serve for the past 18 years. I wish to acknowledge the councillors and the members of the local executive who continue to support me as I balance my duties at the national and constituency levels.

**Mr. Speaker,** I am sure you will agree that the work of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security transforms and empowers the lives of those we serve on a daily basis. The Jamaican people are at the heart of what we do. I would like to place on record my Appreciation to the staff of the Ministry for the quality and depth of work that they do each day.

Last year, I shared the vision for our collective purpose, Bolting the foundation for lasting prosperity through dignity and respect. This year, **Mr. Speaker,** the work continues by building on that foundation as we safeguard the values of dignity in work with true respect for all by.....

## ***“PUTTING THE MINISTRY IN THE PALM OF OUR CITIZENS’ HANDS”***

**Mr. Speaker,** Jamaica has maintained the relationship with Development Bank, the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Special thanks to our bilateral partners and in particular the Governments of Canada, United States and Japan who provide valuable technical support in the execution of our mandate.

**Mr. Speaker,** it is no coincidence that this year marks the 100th Anniversary of the ILO and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Trade Union Act, 1919. Jamaica was the first in the region to pass such legislation that entrenched in law the hard-won rights to freedom of organised labour.

**Mr. Speaker,** this is a demonstration of the value and importance that we as a country place on our workers.

We also honour our tripartite partners, The Jamaica Employers’ Federation and the Jamaica Confederation of Trade Unions who as members of the Labour Advisory Council play an integral role in fostering national development. The Ministry would be constrained in achieving some of its objectives without the engagement and support of the Private Sector and Civil Society.

## STRATEGIC FOCUS

**Mr. Speaker**, the Ministry's strategic priorities are in full alignment with the Government's priorities of Social Protection, Human Capital Development and Inclusive Sustainable Job Creation and Economic Growth. The Ministry is focussed on safeguarding dignity in work and will demonstrate true respect for all through:

- Technology & Innovation for Customer Service Excellence
- Public Education and People Development
- Infrastructure and Accessibility

**Mr. Speaker**, in 2017, the Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Andrew Holness, gave a charge and expounded his vision for the Government to improve its services and move Jamaica towards becoming a digital economy. This he said will aid in productivity and growth. We in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security have bought into this vision.

## TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

**Mr. Speaker**, my aim is to transform the Ministry through the use of Technology and Innovation. In this regard, we have started with the digitization of records across the Ministry.

**Mr. Speaker**, for every worker who contributes to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), we have to keep life records from the time they register/Apply for a NIS number, all their contributions, and applications for benefits up to seven years after they die.

**Mr. Speaker**, valuable real estate is taken up with the storage of paper records. We began the digitization process in 2018 and to date we have scanned over half a million records. Accessibility to documents is now made easier and the processing of benefits more timely.

Following on this initiative, as *we put the Ministry into the Palm of our Citizens*, we intend to allow for the online Application for all NIS benefits by year-end. Since my last presentation we have piloted the Funeral Grant online Application.

**Mr. Speaker**, this Ministry will not allow any bungling in our IT system and so we are in the final stages of testing before the full rollout. We are cognizant that our pensioners depend heavily on their benefits.

**Mr. Speaker** in addition to that, we have just completed an upgrade of our network to fibre optic. This may seem a simple matter, but a lot of the technological improvements could not be done on the old network.

With this upgrade, the Ministry is in the process of procuring a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) system. The VOIP will enable us to improve our internal and external communications and reduce our phone bill by up to 50% or over \$26 million. We are moving to establish a Ministry Call Centre where all customer-related calls will be routed to a central point for immediate response. By the end of the financial year this new system will guarantee that all calls to the Ministry will be dealt with promptly.

**Mr. Speaker**, the *Overseas Work Programme* continues to experience steady growth. During fiscal year 2018-19 **16,778** Jamaicans participated through placements in the United States, Canada and Guantanamo Bay. However, **Mr. Speaker**, we have heard the complaints from workers who say that they have not heard from us, or that they have difficulty in contacting the Ministry. With some of the challenges we face, my own colleagues have offered us assistance in locating these workers, for which I am grateful. We are seeking to change this and by the 2020 season, we will pilot the new Jamaica-Canada Farm Worker App. This App will allow our Canadian farm workers to access information related to their medical dates, visa appointments and flight information.

**Mr. Speaker**, they will not have to wait on the Ministry's call but will be able to access information on their smart phones and other electronic devices.

## LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION SYSTEM

Just two weeks ago we launched the Labour Market Information System App and its enhanced website.

**Mr. Speaker**, job seekers and employers are now able to have an even more robust experience through this App with the functionalities of job search, posting of vacancies and direct Application for jobs using their mobile devices. This effectively **places employment opportunities in the palms of every employer and job seeker**. The App is now available on the Google Play store for android devices and will soon be available on the App store for iOS and Apple devices.

This enhanced version of the Labour Market Information System (LMIS) website renders the site more user -friendly.

**Mr. Speaker**, better job matching and smoother navigation are complemented by contemporary technology which resides in this system.

**Mr. Speaker** I would like to take this opportunity to thank the New Employment Opportunities (NEO) project with its executing body Youth Upliftment Through Employment (YUTE) which assisted with the funding of the LMIS upgrade. There is no doubt that these improvements will contribute to increased employment through the Electronic Labour Exchange (ELE). To secure greater impact the ELE has been under constant improvement and upgrading. Thanks to the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) through its Integrated Social and Labour Project (ISPL) that continues to make this work possible.

**Mr. Speaker**, the results of a labour market study conducted in 2017 by the Ministry, identified the lack of soft skills such as time management and interpersonal skills as factors impacting the high rate of unemployment of our youth.

**Mr. Speaker** in order to address this problem, the Ministry conducted employability workshops and job fairs for over 1,000 jobseekers islandwide. In this financial year, in addition to our LMIS App, we will be ramping up the number of sessions to reach over 1,400 jobseekers with special focus on PATH beneficiaries and unattached youths.

## PUBLIC EDUCATION

**Mr. Speaker**, the second plank on which we are safeguarding dignity in work is by intensifying our public education activities. Last year I committed to intensifying our national awareness programmes, and going to the nooks and crannies of Jamaica. This initiative has commenced with our Community Engagement Series. The PATH team engaged with 65 communities island-wide which lacked easy access to our parish offices. Applications for over 3,500 new families or over 14,000 individuals were processed. We expect to cover another 25 communities this financial year, again **Mr. Speaker** we are **“bringing the Ministry into the palm of our citizens’ hands”**.

As part of the social intervention initiatives under the Zones of Special Operations, we hosted Ministry Days in the communities of Denham Town and Mount Salem. Residents were exposed to the range of services offered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, a total of four (4) days were committed to this intervention.

**Mr. Speaker**, I was deeply touched when one resident shared with me that through this initiative she was able to gain employment after many years of being unemployed. There are many other examples like this as we bring **HOPE** to the youth and other vulnerable Jamaicans.

**Mr. Speaker**, at the core of managing the labour portfolio is recognition of the inalienable right to decent work for all. The dignity of all workers must be recognised and respected, whether unionized or non-unionized. In this the centennial year of the International Labour Organization (ILO), we are even more resolute in our determination to translate the concepts around the 'Decent Work' Agenda in more tangible ways to enhance the quality of life for all workers in Jamaica.

**Mr. Speaker** I am sure you will agree that sustainable prosperity hinges on industrial harmony. We continue to enjoy relatively calm and stable industrial relations climate over the past months. I would like to bring to your attention the fact that currently most industrial disputes relate to the termination of employment. This, **Mr. Speaker** represents a shift from collective disputes usually related to wages, to individual disputes. Indeed, there has been a surge in individual disputes reported to the Ministry. Given this trend, the Pre-Conciliation Arm has been bolstered to offer mediation service and act as the first responder to assist parties to reach amicable settlements at the local level. This proactive approach continues to bear fruit.

## LABOUR DEPARTMENT AND YOU” ROAD SHOW

**Mr. Speaker**, during the 2018-2019 fiscal year we celebrated the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the Labour Department. As part of the celebrations, the Ministry increased public engagement under the theme “*The Labour Department and You*”. Five (5) road shows were held in Manchester, St. Ann, St. James, Kingston and St. Thomas covering all regions under the purview of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

**Mr. Speaker**, I must report to this House that these roadshows effectively reached thousands of Jamaicans from all social strata. This effort **Mr. Speaker**, has served as a re-branding of the Labour Department. As all stakeholders are now seeking the services of the Department in dispute resolution; they are sensitized to the importance of treating with issues in keeping with law, custom and practices.

In collaboration with the Jamaica Confederation of Trade Unions and the Jamaica Employers Federation several networking sessions were held with workers and employers from small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Many expressed Appreciation for the wealth of information provided especially in relation to due process in the workplace, occupational safety and health and child labour.



**Mr. Speaker**, we have seen a significant increase in the number of individual disputes in Western Jamaica which necessitates our intervention. As we drive the decent work agenda, the road shows continue with a mega show in Montego Bay.

**Mr. Speaker**, the work of the Employment Agency Unit is dedicated to securing the integrity of the job seeking process. The Unit continues to issue the mandatory licenses to private employment agency operators, to conduct inspections and to monitor their activities to ensure compliance with the Employment Agencies Regulation Act.

**Mr. Speaker**, to counter scamming, the Ministry has embarked on an education campaign utilizing print and electronic media to sensitize vulnerable job seekers of the dangers of utilizing the services of illegal operators. We believe as a Ministry that it is our duty to protect employees and jobseekers. In furtherance of our resolve, by the end of this calendar year we will launch our digital marketing campaign. Members of the public I want to bring to your attention that there are many unscrupulous persons pretending to be agents of the Ministry Labour and Social Security. Let me emphatically state that the Ministry does not charge for its services. I urge everyone that if a job offer is too good to be true, it probably is not true.

## PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Speaker**, the Ministry continues to place great emphasis on human capital development. For many persons, benefits derived from this Ministry represent a lifeline - a transition from poverty to prosperity.

During the 2018/2019 financial year, PATH our flagship social intervention programme, disbursed over **\$5.3B** to over **130,000** families or **340,000** beneficiaries. Beginning in June 2019, PATH benefit levels were increased by an average of 17%.

**Mr. Speaker**, in September 2018, the Ministry introduced the PATH back-to-school grant for each child registered in school. This grant will continue with over **\$500M** projected to be spent in the 2019/20 financial year. As promised last year we will facilitate direct electronic transfers of benefit payments commencing with the August 2019 payment. This will represent a saving on both sides as well as being more discrete and convenient for the families.

**Mr. Speaker**, under the **Steps to Work Programme**, The Ministry continued to support the entrepreneurial activities of PATH clients in order to provide a platform for families to move towards economic independence. For this financial year, Steps to Work will target **800** PATH households to benefit from up-skilling initiatives and another **600** for **on-the-job training**. Additionally, under this programme, **Mr. Speaker**, a further **1,100** PATH clients will receive financial support to establish micro businesses.

Our aim **Mr. Speaker** is to ultimately remove these persons from the programme who no longer qualify for benefits. This **on-the-job training** is intended to ensure their financial and social stability. If you don't put them in this position of independence, then they will again become dependent on the state for social protection.

This **Mr. Speaker**, is a perfect example of **putting the means to development and economic independence in the palms of our citizens' hands**.

The PATH Programme in its continued commitment to improving the quality of life for our clients hosted sessions on nutrition, child discipline and budgeting. The programme which started in 2017 has since engaged **955** households in the parenting programme. This year we intend to engage a further **500** PATH families targeting parents of children aged 2-6 years.

## OUR PEOPLE .....OUR SUCCESS

**Mr. Speaker** among our proudest moments last year were shining examples of former and current PATH beneficiaries, now well on their way to self-fulfilment through education.

*Of note was the fact that the winner of the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship for 2019 was former PATH beneficiary Mr. Chevano Baker. Spelling champion, Ms. Rhonoya Anderson one of Jamaica's representative to the Scripps Howard Competition in California is a current beneficiary of PATH.*

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Mr. Speaker**, in relation to our programming for persons with disabilities (PWDs) Jamaica continues to reaffirm its commitment to the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The implementation process to facilitate the Disabilities Act is in full gear. It is our intention to have the first two codes of practice and regulations completed by the end of the year. However, as a precursor, **Mr. Speaker**, we must create the most stable and affirming environment in which to operationalize the Act. My team is now working assiduously to solidify the governance and organizational structure which will enable a modernized and more efficient Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD).

**Mr. Speaker**, the (JCPD) is set to transition to a body corporate/public body. We anticipate expanded scope, breadth, functions, and services of the JCPD and as such, the Council must be prepared and properly outfitted for this new role. The JCPD has now finalized the Operational Procedures Manual for their suite of services. The Accessibility Manual obtained from the Access Board in Washington D.C. is being adapted and reconciled with the measurements specified in the Jamaican Building Code.

## GREATER AWARENESS SURROUNDING DISABILITY ISSUES

Lack of awareness is most often the basis for systemic discrimination and social injustice.

**Mr. Speaker**, the JCPD has therefore intensified its public awareness and public education activities to sensitize various social groups about the facts and falsehoods surrounding disability issues.

**Mr. Speaker**, in partnership with the HEART Trust/NTA and the National Youth Service (NYS), the JCPD has delivered thirty-two Public Education sessions. The Council is promoting the use of technology and media for PWDs. In that regard, three sessions were held with the Office of Utilities Regulations (OUR) and service providers regarding the Appropriate technology to be utilized to facilitate access to information for persons with disabilities. Initial dialogue has also been held with the Universal Service Fund (USF) for them to develop more holistic plans to address the technological needs of the disability sector.

As part of the public education thrust, **Mr. Speaker**, the government could not have done it alone. We thank the media fraternity who have been raising the awareness and educating the public on disability matters and encourage them to remain on board with us.

During the 2018/19 financial year, the JCPD provided grants of up to **\$250,000** to persons with disabilities.

**Mr. Speaker** financial assistance in the amount of **\$16.4M** was spent assisting 551 clients with: medical expenses, income generation projects, education, shadow support, special needs, funeral and transportation expenses.

**Mr. Speaker**, a pool of grant funding totaling **\$17M** is available to Persons with Disabilities to facilitate their management of small business ventures for their economic development and/or to acquire assistive devices to enhance their independence.

**Mr. Speaker** for persons to access the benefit they must register with the JCPD. Registration and grant Application forms are available through our Parish Offices or the Head Office of the JCPD.

**Mr. Speaker**, we must enable PWDs to take their rightful place in our society. Need I remind you that we are putting the Ministry in the palms of our citizens' hands?

**Early Stimulation Programme:** *Honouring the right to Education for Children with Disabilities.*

**Mr. Speaker**, Children with Disabilities have a special place within the world of our Ministry as they have at least two areas of social vulnerability – by age and by functionality.

**Mr. Speaker**, over the past year the ESP has facilitated the transition of one hundred children with special needs into mainstream and special education schools. One hundred and forty children with disabilities were given a new lease on life with assistive aids such as specialized wheelchairs, hearing aids and walkers. One Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifteen children received therapy treatment through the community-based intervention programme for children with disabilities to enhance their physical and emotional health.

**Mr. Speaker**, Let us emphasize abilities not disabilities of our very special children!

**Mr. Speaker**, in keeping with the global trend, Jamaica's population is aging and senior citizens comprise 12.6% of the population. This number is expected to rise significantly in the next decade.

**The National Council for Senior Citizens (NCSC)** continues to provide services to the elderly and drive the revision of the **National Policy for Senior Citizens**. The response from members of the public to the Green Paper was not forthcoming.

So **Mr. Speaker**, we took the matter live and direct to them. Stakeholder consultations ended in June 2019 with regional town hall meetings in Mandeville and the Corporate Area. We are now collating inputs on the Green Paper to validate and fine-tune the policy. ***We intend to have this document ratified with implementation taking place on a phased basis.***

**Mr. Speaker**, in this new global environment, we must constantly benchmark our policies and practices against international standards, even while remaining sensitive to local needs. Through the NCSC, Jamaica participated in the PAHO/WHO Technical Meeting on aging and health in Latin America and the Caribbean. The gathering analyzed the implementation of the Integrated Care for Older People (ICOPE) and a long-term care system in the region. This yielded a specific work schedule with the Ministry of Health & Wellness and PAHO.

For the 2018-2019 financial year **Mr. Speaker**, the Council's priority areas were Education, Health, Income Security and Infrastructure as well as the Golden Age Support Programme. The Council hosted retirement planning seminars, and basic computer skills training. In the spirit of promoting active aging, our partnership with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, provided programmes which allowed more than 1,000 seniors to get moving for fitness and camaraderie.

Jamaica was built on the backs of our seniors who sacrificed much. Their rich legacy has armed us with a culture that is both engaging and potentially lucrative. I must therefore Appeal to our collective conscience to be more respectful, caring and inclusive. Many seniors still have much to offer and they do so willingly. Yet we are constantly saddened by the frequency of elder abuse – financially, emotionally and physically.

**Mr. Speaker** it is often said that it takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a civilized nation to safeguard our elders.

## NATIONAL INSURANCE SCHEME

**Mr. Speaker**, bearing in mind the current situation with the social security schemes globally, and not least of all here at home, the value of the work of the National Insurance Fund (NIF) has peaked in recent years. With a pension population of around 121,000, the NIS disbursed **\$19.4B** in benefits, receiving only **\$17.9B** in contributions.

**Mr. Speaker** there remains a gap of **\$1.5B**. As our eyes remain fixed on the scheme's viability, the procurement process has commenced to undertake an updated Actuarial Review during this Financial Year.

The NIF's primary focus is to maximise returns within acceptable risks while maintaining a level of liquidity to enable timely payment of NIS benefits. The NIF continues to review asset allocations in order to ensure that there is Appropriate diversification given the ever-changing dynamics of the investment environment in which the Fund operates.

**Mr. Speaker**, as at March 31, 2019, the Net Asset Value of the Fund stood at **\$120.7B** an increase of **13.67%** over FY18. The growth rate in the Fund's net assets value for FY19 was driven primarily by the performance of the equity portfolio which grew by **31.3%**.

**Mr. Speaker**, whilst we await the commencement of an Actuarial Review, we are mindful of the fact that a significant inflow of funds to the NIF come from NIS contributions. We are mindful also **Mr. Speaker** that the NIS is to date the surest form of social protection for our Jamaican citizens. Today as I speak, less than 50% of the workforce contributes to the NIS. This is unacceptable especially when we look at the statistics with respect to the aging population and the demands that will be made in order to provide for their well-being and welfare. Under the law every Jamaican over the age of 18 must register with the NIS. It is incumbent on us as a Ministry to engage these persons wherever they are so that they can start contributing to the NIS.

This **Mr. Speaker** will be in their best interest. I encourage employers to register those persons in their employ and to remind them that the NIS is contributory and it is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that all workers contract or otherwise contribute to the NIS in keeping with the provisions of the law.

***Cultivating dignity in work by protecting the next generation.***

Last year, **Mr. Speaker**, I announced that a United States Department of Labour funded Project, the ***Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labour*** (CLEAR II) had been tailored for Jamaica. We have since made significant progress as we have now finalized lists of work that is permissible for children ages 13-14 years, as well as a hazardous work list circumscribing the kind of environment in which children should never be employed.

**Mr. Speaker**, I am pleased to advise that we are advanced in the development and review of a ***National Action Plan on Child Labour***. We are giving special consideration to the uniqueness of child labour at the parish level to address the specific root cause of this problem.

**Mr. Speaker** the Jamaica Youth Activity Survey 2016 (published last year) revealed that 38,000 Jamaican children were engaged in child labour. The Ministry responded by conducting a suite of community level interventions with students, teachers, and mixed audiences to sensitize them about the ills of child labour and human trafficking.

**Mr. Speaker**, June 12, 2019, was observed as World Day Against Child Labour. To mark the occasion, the Ministry mounted a march from our North Street Office to St. William Grant Park, downtown, Kingston. Our message was ***“Children should not be working in fields but on their dreams”***. We remain committed to eradicating this injustice meted out to our children. We know that this will not be easy, but we remain resolute as we intensify the implementation plans, policies and systems to rid Jamaica of this scourge.

**Mr. Speaker**, on the advice of the National Minimum Wage Commission, last year, I Approved an increase of 12.9% in the National Minimum Wage. This represents the highest increase ever granted.

**Mr. Speaker** let me emphasize that the review of the minimum wage is ongoing. The Commission will again be engaging the public in consultation as it conducts its review and makes recommendations for an adjustment to the minimum wage.

**Mr. Speaker**, I must remind us all that the National Minimum Wage is a floor and not a ceiling. It is a social protection mechanism, and legally defines the lowest compensation for any Jamaican worker. Therefore, I commend all employers who routinely compensate above this threshold to honour the value of their employees.

# OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (OSH)

**Mr. Speaker** let me now give an update on the progress we have made towards the enactment of the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Bill. This piece of legislation, which supports the Decent Work Agenda, addresses safety and health in the Jamaican workplace. Currently, the Bill is before a Joint Select Committee of Parliament for consideration.

The committee has been deliberating on submissions received from both private and public sector organizations. I urge every Jamaican; workers and employers, to become familiar with the legislation as I dare-say, it will be a game changer for us in Jamaica. The Bill is available on both Parliament's and the Ministry's websites.

While the process is taking longer than we would have expected, this is about diligence, not negligence. By its nature and purpose the Bill is quite complex and the Committee is reviewing the Bill clause by clause to ensure that we have the best version possible. We cannot take any risks with such as our collective health and safety in the **workplace are paramount at this time more than ever.**



**Mr. Speaker**, global realities include migrant labour. Just as we welcome employment opportunities abroad, so we welcome foreigners to fill gaps in **our** labour market. I wish to assure every Jamaican that we issue work permits with due consideration of each case and in full compliance with the governing regulations.

In our quest for continued improvement **Mr. Speaker**, we have amended the *Foreign Nationals and Commonwealth Citizens (Employment) (Work Permit Fees) Regulations, 1973* to streamline the Applicability of work permit fees by sector and to simplify the fee structure. We have eliminated one administrative layer by excluding partial refunds to permit holders who depart before the expiration of their documents. The Regulations were published in the Gazette and the amendment took effect on April 1, 2019.

## PRODUCTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

**Mr. Speaker**, Sustainable economic growth can only be achieved through national productivity improvement. The Ministry has mandated the Jamaica Productivity Centre (JPC) to create a strategic direction that helps Jamaica to step boldly up the productivity ladder.

Quite honestly, **Mr. Speaker**, we have much work to do together. A 2017 productivity Performance study by the JPC revealed negative labour productivity growth for almost every industry within the Jamaican economy. The only exception is manufacturing. We urgently need a sector by sector analysis to reveal how best to reposition and develop seamless cross-sectoral linkages. We must do this to ignite the overall economy and by extension to raise the standard of living for Jamaicans.

To support the emergence of a culture of productivity, we have begun the groundwork for the development of a **National**

**Policy for Productivity Improvement.** To further seed this culture shift, the Ministry is making it an intergenerational mission with the large-scale integration of our youth. We are working to ensure that they understand the real-world relevance of productivity and how it Applies to their own day-to-day endeavours.

Along with our partners in education, the JPC is identifying student productivity ambassadors to arm them with the tools to become effective peer influencers. We are confident in the accelerated diffusion of this innovation once the students begin to experience the direct impact in their academic and social lives as well as other pursuits.

**Mr. Speaker,** with greater productivity we are putting prosperity in the palm of the citizens' hands.

**Mr. Speaker,** even as the economy continues to recover and grow, we are mindful that there are still many Jamaicans who need additional support. This is where the Ministry's **Public Assistance Department** comes in.

Last year the Ministry provided grants totaling **\$110M** under the Rehabilitation Programme. The grants provided eased the plight of **3,400** Jamaicans in their time of grief, as well as recovery from natural or manmade disasters. Under the **Short-Term Poverty Intervention Programme**, **3,928** Jamaicans benefited from **\$65,000,000M** in grants.

As the primary state agency responsible for coordinating humanitarian assistance during times of disaster, we are grateful for the relatively calm hurricane season in 2018. We are however please to report that emergency grants were provided to **732 persons** with a total pay-out of approximately **\$20M**. Bedding, toiletries and other supplies were also provided to more than **600** families.

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND PHYSICAL FACILITIES

The Ministry has embarked upon a number of initiatives aimed at improving our facilities. We are aware that as a service-Ministry we need to ensure that our facilities provide greater accessibility and comfort to our internal and external clients. In this regard, we are pursuing a number of initiatives. These include:

### 1. The opening of new or improved offices

- a. A new Parish Office was opened in Hanover on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February.
- b. Construction is almost complete for a new office in St. Ann and it is expected to be officially opened by December 2019.
- c. Our St. James office is to be completely renovated and will be opened in the 2020/2021 financial year.
- d. The drawings to completely renovate the NIS Office located at 18 Ripon Road has been finalised and will shortly be put to tender.
- e. The renovation of the facilities at the Overseas Employment Centre on East Street continues this year.
- f. **Mr. Speaker,** the main offices of the Labour division of the Ministry is located at 1F North Street. The building was in need of extensive repairs on the exterior.  
**Mr. Speaker,** in its 45 years of existence, it is the second time it is being painted.
- g. Members of this house, I must admit that I came last year and promised that we would have opened an arm of the Industrial Disputes Tribunal in the Western Parish of St. James, but finding suitable and affordable space in the West proved to be more difficult than expected. I am pleased to report that a lease has been signed and a contract for the renovation has also been signed. IDT West will soon become a reality.
- h. We are increasing the number of public access points to the ELE through the installation of kiosks in our parish offices. St. Catherine, St. Ann, and Hanover have already been outfitted with St. Elizabeth and Harbour Street next in line. We are also exploring stand-alone units at partner locations such as the Up-Park Camp facility of the Jamaica Defense Force.

- i. To ensure that the key services of the Ministry are accessible to the communities and deep rural Jamaica, we are in the process of procuring three (3) buses that will be used as mobile offices to aid in the delivery of and greater access to the services of the Ministry. **This too includes the registration of NIS beneficiaries, PATH senior citizens and PWDs. Mr. Speaker** we must find them if we intend to be there for them and so we are taking the Ministry to the communities.

Again, **Mr. Speaker**, we are “putting the services of the Ministry in palms of the citizens’ hands.”

## SECURITY GUARDS AND CONTRACT WORKERS

Importantly, **Mr. Speaker**, there are two matters that I wish to address in this Honourable House. These matters which relate to Security Guards and Contract workers, have dominated the public space, political and otherwise, over the past months.

The Ministry has been monitoring the situation concerning the status and entitlements of security guards. Over the years, several complaints of companies failing to pay various entitlements have been brought to our attention. In response to those complaints, Officers in the Ministry seek to arrive at a settlement between the security guards and the companies. Where there is no settlement, those cases are referred to the Courts. We wish to report that in most of those instances, the decisions have been in favour of security guards.

We have been collaborating with the Private Security Regulation Authority to ensure that companies observe labour laws and the standards for decent work. This Ministry and the Private Security Regulation Authority will undertake initiatives to strengthen enforcement capabilities and efficiencies in both entities.

The Ministry is moving to prosecute companies which are in breach of the labour laws. Since June of this year, five companies have been referred to the Ministry’s Legal Division for prosecution. It is our intention that all companies flouting the law will eventually be held accountable.

**Mr. Speaker**, this Ministry is sending a warning to all security companies that if you breach the law, you will face the consequences.

Notwithstanding previous initiatives as well as those now underway, as Minister of Labour, I will be placing the matter of the status and work arrangements of security guards before a joint select committee of the Parliament later this financial year. This will allow the issues affecting security guards to be ventilated and deliberated through open and transparent public discourse.

**Mr. Speaker**, this Minister of Labour is committed to a resolution of this important issue once and for all.

The Ministry has been paying careful attention to the discussions surrounding contract work. Like the International Labour Organization (ILO), we recognize that there are often benefits associated with fixed term contract employment. These arrangements, considered to be a form of non standard work, have become increasingly popular in newly established positions and emerging occupations. They often provide flexibility to enterprises, allowing them to respond to various operational changes and demands. In the right situations, contract work also provides benefits to workers. It is common knowledge that certain workers opt for fixed term contracts for reasons which includes attractive gratuity payments.

The Ministry therefore recognizes that not all contract work is undesirable. The problem arises however where contractual arrangements are used as a ploy to remove from workers certain statutory rights, entitlements and protection prescribed by law. A common example is where a contract may seek to disguise the employer/ employee relationships as a means of denying a worker vacation and maternity leave or to relieve the employer of obligations to workers such as healthcare and pensions. It is in these types of circumstances that contract work is considered to be precarious and oppressive.

Where the Ministry becomes aware of these situations, every effort is made to assist these workers to obtain the entitlements due to them under the law by referring the matters to the Courts or to the Industrial Disputes Tribunal. Additionally, my enforcement powers as the Minister of Labour under several labour legislation have been utilized to bring delinquent employers in compliance with the law.

**Mr. Speaker,** I wish to assure the public that the Ministry is concerned with the trend of precariousness in contract employment. We also find troubling global reports which points to underinvestment in training, innovation and lowered productivity associated with these forms of contractual arrangements. In this regard, the Ministry is prepared to examine good practices internationally and to engage tripartite discussions with a view of carving out an Appropriate national response, balancing the interests of both employers and employees.

# CONCLUSION

**Mr. Speaker**, this afternoon, it has been my honour of outlining to this honourable house our achievements and plans under the twin portfolios of Labour and Social Security. We are guided by the common vision as stated in Vision 2030:

***“Jamaica, the place of choice to live, work, raise families, and do business”  
and in the words of the Prime Minister to also retire.***

This administration, **Mr. Speaker** was handed a mandate by the people of Jamaica to deliver on our commitment for a more prosperous nation. We remain committed, as the Ministry not only seeks to create an enabling environment for the creation of opportunities but also deploys a mission to mobilize Jamaicans to capitalize on those opportunities; working through strategic partnerships to bring about prosperity to this great nation.

The task is demanding, but not insurmountable and so the Ministry is committed to; protecting the vulnerable; economic growth through increased productivity and human capital development so that we can continue to compete in the global marketplace; providing decent work and raising the standard of living for all Jamaicans.

**Mr. Speaker**, I invite every citizen to become active partners in this national effort to ***safeguard DIGNITY in WORK and demonstrate TRUE RESPECT for all as we build a better future for Jamaica.***

I Thank You.



